



Environmental Quality Commission

Lindell Ormsbee, Chair, *Lexington*
Betsy Bennett, Vice-Chair, *Louisville*
Aloma Dew, *Owensboro*
Patty Wallace, *Louisia*
Gary Revlett, *Shelbyville*
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Commonwealth of Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission

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Ernie Fletcher
Governor

LaJuana S. Wilcher
Secretary
Environmental and Public
Protection Cabinet

January 22, 2004

The Honorable Ernie Fletcher
State Capitol
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Governor Fletcher:

The Environmental Quality Commission (EQC), a seven member citizen board, created to advise the Governor and other state officials on environmental matters would like to call your attention to the attached resolution on **Children's Environmental Health in Kentucky**.

Every day our children are subject to a host of hazards--from accidents and drugs to family and school violence. The state has worked diligently to address these concerns but we have fallen short when it comes to assessing the toll environmental degradation is taking on our children and our future.

Last October, EQC brought together experts from across the state and the nation to discuss the linkages between children's health and environmental degradation. And what we learned was disturbing. For example,

- Six percent of the children tested in Kentucky by local health departments had elevated lead levels in their blood that could lead to brain damage, learning disabilities and lifelong dysfunction compared to the national average of 2.2 percent.
- One out of every two private water wells tested by local health departments detected fecal coliform, an indication that the water may be contaminated and at high risk to children for gastrointestinal illnesses.
- More than 2,000 children under the age of 14 were hospitalized for asthma last year with some of the highest admissions in Jefferson, Pike, Daviess and Graves counties. Ozone pollution, second-hand smoke and other pollutants are suspected to be exacerbating asthma.

Since 1992, the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) has prepared a biennial report on the State of Kentucky's Environment, which uses more than 100 indicators to track environmental progress and problems in the state. After this meeting the commission recognized the need to develop an equivalent environmental health tool for helping local and state officials track human health impacts of environmental degradation and identifying potential factors influencing public health. EQC, working with federal, state and local officials has developed a set of core indicators designed to help measure children's environmental health in Kentucky, putting into focus the special vulnerabilities of children in order to help guide environmental and health policies in the Commonwealth. This report will be available on the EQC Web site in the near future.

In addition, EQC has developed the attached recommendations based on the public forum and input from officials with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Ky. Department for Public Health, University of Louisville School of Medicine and local health departments.

The commission hopes you will carefully review these findings and recommendations and encourage these actions to better protect our children. Please feel free to contact Leslie Cole, director, if you have any questions concerning these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Chairman, Environmental Quality Commission

Cc: LaJuana Wilcher, Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet Mayor Jerry Abramson
Dr. James Holsinger, Health and Families Cabinet Allyson Hadley, Gov. Office
Riggs Lewis, Gov. Office

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KENTUCKY ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COMMISSION *CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN KENTUCKY* RESOLUTION

Whereas, Kentucky's children number 994,818, and represent 25 percent of the state's population and 100 percent of our future, and

Whereas, Kentucky's children are now better protected with the advancement of vaccines and medicines, however, a new set of risks from injuries, environmental toxins, family violence, birth defects, cancer and development disorders pose growing challenges, and

Whereas, The majority of evidence indicates that now more than ever, the environment is influencing our health and the health of our children and may be contributing to:

Pediatric asthma rates in Kentucky, which are among the highest in the United States.

Pediatric cancers in Kentucky, which are now the leading cause of death by disease in children.

Birth defects in Kentucky, now the leading cause of child mortality.

Learning disorders in Kentucky, which now affect an estimated 1 out of 4 children, and

Whereas, On Oct. 16, 2003 experts from across the state and nation gathered at a public forum hosted by EQC to review a number of environmental hazards Kentucky's children are exposed to such as radon, solvents, lead, asbestos, mercury, arsenic, sulfur dioxide, secondhand smoke and ozone which fall into categories such as neurotoxins, endocrine disrupters, carcinogens and respiratory irritants, and

Whereas, While all of Kentucky's children face health risks posed by environmental hazards, those 1 out of 5 children living in poverty bear a disproportionate risk of exposure to environmental contaminants and are more exposed to environmental hazards from factories, landfills, waste dumps, hazardous waste facilities, as well as poor housing conditions, and

Whereas, Adequately protecting the health of infants and children from environmental harm in Kentucky will require strong public/private partnerships, sound information and data and innovative programs that promote healthy outdoor, home and school environments.

Now, Therefore be it Resolved by the Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission:

- 1) The Cabinet for Health Services working with the Children's Environmental Health Working Group create the Children's Environmental Health Partnership composed of experts from appropriate state/federal agencies, academic, health care professions, legal interests, communities, relevant nonprofit organizations and business and industry interest to promote a statewide dialogue on current and emerging children's environmental health issues, serve as an advocate for children's environmental health policy needs and develop a statewide action plan to:

- (a) Strengthen Health Surveillance - Improve collection, coordination and use of health surveillance data to assess children's environmental health and help identify critical areas.
- (b) Build Public Awareness - Build and strengthen awareness of children's environmental health issues in Kentucky among health care providers as well as state decision-makers, employers, school administrators and the general public.
- (c) Utilize Existing Resources - Promote greater state use of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Southeast Pediatric Environmental Specialty Unit at Emory University in Atlanta, which is funded in part by the EPA and seven states in the region, including Kentucky.
- (d) Evaluate Standards - Evaluate the state's existing public health standards and programs to ensure they incorporate new information and ideas about children's environmental health to ensure our health protection regulations and programs are timely and focused on vulnerable populations.
- (e) Prioritize and Target High Risks - Strengthen tracking of childhood asthma, neurological, learning and behavioral disorders, birth defects, cancer and other childhood diseases through the expanded use of the state Geographic Information System to better assess the distribution of childhood diseases/disorders and environmental risk factors.
- (f) Promote Safe and Healthy Indoor Environments - Support a statewide initiative to target schools, daycares, homes and other public places to advance safe and healthy pollution-free indoor environments for children in support of the state's "Healthy Kentuckians 2010" goals.

2) The Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet review toxic releases in Kentucky including the release of Priority Persistent, Bioaccumulative, and Toxic pollutants (PBT) as identified by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which pose a significant health risk to children and the developing fetus. Persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic pollutants are highly toxic, long-lasting substances that can build up in the food chain to levels that are harmful to human and ecosystem health. They are associated with a range of adverse human health effects, including effects on the nervous system, reproductive and developmental problems, cancer, and genetic impacts. The commission recommends the Department for Environmental Protection develop a Toxics Action Plan to include:

- Identify PBTs and High Risk Areas - Identify generators and locations in the state where PBTs are released or are a potential hazard.
- Encourage PBT Reductions - Develop state reduction goals and work with local governments and industries to track progress and encourage voluntary reductions of PBTs using incentives and other tools.
- Monitor Toxic Pollutants - Monitor the release of toxic pollutants in Kentucky, prioritize chemical releases based on risk, target reductions and measure progress.

3) That Mayor Jerry Abramson, the Metro Louisville Air Pollution Control District, the West Jefferson County Community Task Force and the Justice Resource Center be commended for their efforts to monitor, assess and reduce industrial toxic air emissions in Louisville and that the Metro Government be encouraged to continue to review and set strong standards and reduction goals to address the health risks posed to infants and children by the release of toxic chemicals to the air, land and water.

4) That this resolution be forwarded to Governor Ernie Fletcher; Allyson Handley, Secretary of Executive Cabinet; Riggs Lewis, Special Advisor to Governor on Public Policy; LaJuana Wilcher, Secretary of the Environment and Public Protection Cabinet; and Dr. James Holsinger, Secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services; and Mayor Jerry Abramson for consideration and action.



Signed

January 15, 2004

Date